

VZCZCXRO8252
PP RUEHRN
DE RUEHLGB #0719/01 3080621
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 040621Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6398
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUZEFAA/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP 0095
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0301

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIGALI 000719

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/03/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [RW](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION FIGURE NTAGANDA TO CHALLENGE KAGAME AT
2010 POLLS

KIGALI 00000719 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador W. Stuart Symington for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On October 25, members of the fledgling Parti Social-Imberakuri (PS-Imberakuri) party voted overwhelmingly to nominate party founder Bertrand Ntaganda, an ethnic Hutu lawyer, to be their candidate for Rwanda's 2010 presidential elections. Ntaganda was a founding member of the Parti Social Democrate (PSD), who broke with that party in late 2008 after failing to win election to parliament on the PSD slate. During his acceptance speech, Ntaganda urged Rwandans not to accept election results if they are unfair. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On October 25, the recently-formed PS-Imberakuri political party held a convention and chose party founder Bernard Ntaganda to be its candidate for Rwanda's 2010 presidential elections. Roughly 200 party delegates and 200 observers were present, including a dozen print and radio journalists, state-run national TV, as well as polcouns and pol FSN. The audience was overwhelmingly male, and in the judgment of one local, overwhelmingly ethnic Hutu. The venue was a conference hall rented from the local Catholic diocese adjacent to Sainte Famille, the site of a notorious genocide massacre. As the audience waited for the event to begin, the organizers aired well-known Kinyarwanda songs praising freedom and tolerance written by an iconic Rwandan musician. The tone of the meeting was initially somewhat nervous, then more relaxed but still restrained.

¶3. (SBU) Ntaganda delivered opening remarks, saying the party was "necessary for our survival" and boasting that it had grown remarkably fast in its short existence. Comparing it to a mythical baby that walked on its first day of life, he said only the ruling Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) party had more members than PS-Imberakuri. The party had a headquarters building, its own bank account, and even a website that supporters could use to contribute money or comments. Continuing with his remarks, Ntaganda explained that the congress was meeting in order to choose a candidate for the 2010 presidential elections, endorse agreements Ntaganda signed recently with other parties outside Rwanda, and endorse the party's stance on gacaca trials, which he described as "an injustice to all Rwandans." Ntaganda concluded by inviting all to speak openly and freely, something Rwandans "have not been able to do since 1994." At this, members of the audience cautiously waved party flags and held up roses (the party's symbol).

¶4. (SBU) Following a party cadre's explanation of the voting rules--one man, one vote; secret ballot-- Ntaganda and another candidate, Jean-Claude Nzaramba, introduced themselves and described their qualifications. Without

naming the RPF or incumbent President Paul Kagame, the party cadre commented that "the other team is a strong team" and urged party members to "choose a suitable candidate to oppose him." Delegates voted, cadres collected the votes, and then read them out one vote at a time, tallying them on a chalkboard. Ntaganda won by a count of 153 votes to 12. After it became clear he would win, the crowd applauded politely each time Nzaramba got a vote.

¶5. (SBU) In his acceptance speech, Ntaganda said he was overcome with emotions, "like a mother who just delivered a beautiful, healthy baby." Thanking delegates for their support, he declared that the voting process showed "the support, he declared that the voting process showed "the picture of democratic culture our party is fighting for" and that Rwanda needed "fair and transparent elections like these" on August 9, 2010. "You know who I am going to oppose," he continued, "and there must be fair play. If elections are not fair, Rwandans have the right to say so." Ntaganda added that the PS-Imberakuri opposed the draft revision of the electoral code now being considered in parliament. According to him, it contained language requiring citizens to accept the results of the election (NFI). "We say no, we must not accept them," he concluded.

¶6. (C) BIO NOTE: Bernard Ntaganda Abdelkarim was born in 1967, in Ruhango district, Southern province. He is single but is due to marry this month. An ethnic Hutu, he graduated from Kabgayi seminary secondary school and then served for a short time as assistant bourgmestre (mayor) of the former Tambwe Commune. He helped found the Parti Social Democrate (PSD) in 1992, and was PSD party chairman in the former Gitarama province. He commenced law studies at the National University of Rwanda (NUR) in Butare. After the genocide, he was arrested and jailed for several months for alleged

KIGALI 00000719 002.2 OF 002

genocide-related crimes. Instead of returning to NUR he simultaneously enrolled in law studies at Universite Libre de Kigali--eventually obtaining a four-year degree in law--and worked at the Rwanda Revenue Authority in the legal affairs department. For the past several years, he has been in private practice, and found time to earn a distance-education MBA from the University of Maastricht. Shortly before the 2003 presidential elections, the PSD suspended Ntaganda for one year, after he criticized PSD leaders and accused them of allowing RPF members to join and infiltrate the PSD. In 2008, he was on the PSD's list during parliamentary elections, but failed to win a seat. In late 2008, he quit the PSD and decided to form his own party, the PS-Imberakuri.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Ntaganda has previously circulated communiques, but it was noteworthy that during the two-plus hours that polcouns attended the convention, there was little mention and no discussion of the party's platform or substantive issues. This was primarily a meeting to validate Ntaganda's candidacy and decisions he had already taken. Ntaganda presented a strong opposition message, though he greatly exaggerated his party's strength. Like the PSD, the general consensus is that PS-Imberakuri's supporters are virtually all ethnic Hutu. It is also probable that the strongest base of the new party will be in southern Rwanda where the PSD has its roots. (North-South tensions remain a fact of Rwandan life.) If Ntaganda plays the "Hutu card" he may mobilize that base, but he would run afoul of Rwandan law designed to prevent a return to the violent ethnic identity politics of the past. The law mandates strong penalties for those whose actions constitute "divisionism" or especially "genocide ideology." (The phrase "We are all Rwandan" reflects continuing GOR efforts to instill a single national Rwandan identity in place of ethnic identification.) We expect PS-Imberakuri's actions and statements to be closely scrutinized, both by the RPF whom Ntaganda accused of infiltrating the PSD in the past, and by the GOR. For the moment, Rwandan authorities appear confident that Ntaganda is not a serious threat. That may explain their decision to

allow state-run television and radio to broadcast portions of the event. If Ntaganda is seen to be fanning ethnic tensions, the GOR will respond. END COMMENT.
SYMINGTON